

Adopting El by CherishIsTheWord

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Summary:

El has been staying at the Wheeler home for the time being, but where will her permanent home be once all is settled? The question of El's adoption involves misunderstandings, creative legwork, and further revelations in Mike & Eleven's relationship.

1. A Temporary Solution

Author's Note:

A slight change from the insular one-shots of the series so far, but it will fall within this same storyline as the others. Expect very short chapters and eventual Mike/Eleven interactions that tie it all together. As always comments are more than welcome!

El was back, and at first, it was all about celebrating her remarkable return and getting her comfortable. In the meantime, everyone knew it was in her best interests after her mysterious, traumatic time away to be situated in the only place she could rightfully have ever called a loving home. For El to feel comfortable, that meant being near the first person she sought and the first person she would speak to upon that fateful day she came back. That person, of course, was Mike. She wouldn't have had it any other way.

And so, at least for the time being, El was back in the Wheeler home. This time was a little different from the last; she didn't have to live in hiding and could now get to know the rest of the family. Hopefully, this would give the girl a chance at a happy, normal life for once.

This initial arrangement could only go so far without the paperwork to back it up. There was a larger community in play, and at some point word of mouth about this strange, undocumented young girl coming out of nowhere would raise questions that those in El's inner circle would have to answer to. And so something had to be addressed sooner or later: Where was the girl who never had a home going to live permanently?

Fortunately, the girl was not short on vested parties. Chief Jim Hopper, Joyce Byers, and Karen Wheeler (with a hefty dose of influence from Mike) had now all had experiences with El, becoming the de facto decision-makers on this unusual case. In their discussions, they arrived at five legitimate options to consider for El's future. Nothing seemed totally ideal, they soon discovered. Fitting, since when had this girl's life, or anything of late in the town of

Hawkins, ever been ideal?

2. Home Option 1: The Byers

Summary for the Chapter:

On Joyce as the potential caregiver to El.

It was a sad commentary on Eleven's upbringing. Despite having only known each other for mere hours one November evening, Joyce Byers had easily been the most maternal figure up to that point in El's life. Joyce saw a confused, neglected young girl who was willing to risk everything for her son, a boy El had never met. And so, Joyce took it upon herself to offer to be caring as she could in such a terrible situation. How could she not?

Papa may have been kind when he got what he wanted, but this was different. From El's perspective, she met this woman who she knew needed help but was being exceptionally kind to her and supportive even when things became frightening and didn't go as planned. She got a glimpse of it with Benny, but now she knew that maybe there is a world out there where the adults aren't always the bad people to be feared.

When it came time to discuss what to do with El, Joyce's affection for the girl could not be questioned. However, the home situation with Byers presented some significant challenges.

Joyce continued to work tirelessly and Jonathan helped out where he could, but the family was struggling financially as much as ever and they certainly weren't well-equipped to take on another child. As much as the others would have been willing to help, it would have been a lot to ask and Joyce would not have felt right taking on so much assistance.

The bigger issue stood with Will, who was continuing to have struggles with his experiences the previous year. He was often sick and, when not, he was haunted by the memories. The Byers managed somehow, but it was a big undertaking emotionally. As much as El would have been one of the only people who could truly relate to Will in these matters, perhaps it was better to spare her an environment that would involve reliving the trauma on a regular

basis.

Notes for the Chapter:

Comments and suggestions are welcome! I have this piece roughly worked out but I'm happy to incorporate some of your thoughts.

3. Home Option 2: Hopper

Summary for the Chapter:

On the idea of El living with Chief Jim Hopper, a man in need of redemption.

Nobody beyond himself and a few at the lab knew it, but Jim Hopper had some serious amends to make regarding El. Though he made a deal he thought was for the greater good - saving Will Byers at any cost, the arrangement sold out El to the very people who had imprisoned her and resulted in her devastating disappearance. Jim knew he did what he did for a good reason, but the outcome still haunted him. As luck would have it, Hopper would soon become privy to a secret that might ameliorate that guilt.

El didn't know this Hopper guy very well. Truthfully, the chief was a bit intimidating and not as forthcoming as Benny, the first man who had ever been genuinely kind to her. Still, she knew from the boys and the way he was helping them against the bad men that he was someone she should probably trust. El didn't know why, but she also sensed a great loss within this man, one that he carried everywhere as much as he tried to hide it. Hopper was someone who had pain in his past just like she had, so there was an odd connection between them. She found out later, before she had found her way back to the boys, that Hopper was the one leaving her food and belongings she needed to survive. She didn't know how he knew, but for that she would be forever grateful.

As the town's chief of police and with nobody to look after, Hopper certainly had the means to take care of Eleven. And he was certainly determined to make things right for this girl. It wouldn't take long for a fondness for the girl to develop, too. She was brave, kind, and vulnerable. She remained innocent in the face of cruel realities surrounding her. Each of these qualities reminded him of an all-too-familiar void in his life, a young girl shaped-void he still had troubling facing. Hopper had, of course, lost his one and only daughter Sarah years ago. In many respects, it was this fact that Hopper seem a particularly fitting candidate to adopt El. They were, after all, two lost souls needing to move forward.

In another time, perhaps it would be a perfect fit. On the other hand, Jim was still a very damaged, conflicted man. The trauma of having lost his own daughter still hit so close to home and everyone could see the struggles that would arise any time he had confront feelings that would conjure up those memories. That was something that El, through no fault of her own, tended to do by simply being there as a potential daughter figure.

If nothing else better could be arranged, he would absolutely take in the girl, no questions asked. But more than anything, he was devoted to finding the best home possible for El. Maybe he wasn't in an emotionally stable frame of mind to do that himself? The man knew he certainly had a lot of personal healing to do, and he wasn't sure if he would want to risk testing that out with the girl who had already been through so much. If he couldn't convince himself, he would certainly have a difficult time convincing a judge if it ever came to that. The day that Hopper became whole again would come sooner or later, but it might have to wait.

Notes for the Chapter:

I hope people are enjoying this. I know it is a lot of description so far, but it is a lead-up to some Mike and Eleven scenes I promise are on the horizon!

4. Home Option 3: The Ives

Summary for the Chapter:

El is taken to meet Terry and Becky Ives, significantly affecting the course of what could happen with El. Later, Mike has a heart to heart with Eleven about family.

Notes for the Chapter:

I told you some Mike and Eleven moments were on their way and here they begin! I hope you like it. Comments and suggestions welcome as always. :)

The case of Terry Ives was a sad story. This young woman maintained her child, a child with special abilities, had not died at birth and was instead taken away. Terry never gave up on the search for the truth, but, years later, the many drugs she had been introduced to had taken their toll to the point where her mind had been shattered.

The familiar aspects of the story had naturally drawn Joyce and Hopper to investigate the matter when El's presence in Hawkins had first become known. Upon her re-emergence, the need to follow up with Terry Ives, via her caregiver and sister Becky, became apparent. After all, if Eleven was really the missing Jane, they had a moral duty to do so.

Truthfully, none of the parties actually knew for sure Eleven was this child, even if Joyce and Hopper felt they had a pretty good idea. With this trace of doubt and for a host of other reasons – the broken state of Terry, the resistance from Becky, Eleven's comfort – they elected not to inform the girl who she was going to be meeting a few hours out of town. With the boys off at school, they kept it simple and told her she was going to be meeting an old friend of theirs. It seemed to satisfied El enough to go along for the ride, though she was always uneasy about meeting somebody new.

Upon arrival, El, ever the empathetic one, felt very sorry for this

woman who was obviously very ill. With a mixture of curiosity and compassion, she tried her best to reach out, even attempting to initiate a conversation with her, a feat she never did with strangers.

As far as the other lady at the home, El didn't think she liked Becky very much. El caught the woman glaring at her a couple of times, and when Joyce and the chief took the lady aside to talk she seemed to have harsh words for them.

The visit with El, unfortunately, did not help Terry to improve. The poor woman remained non-responsive to the new guest before her and it would remain that way. Becky, after having gone through so much with her sister already, resented the familiar faces from the year prior stopping by. She remained unconvinced of the story her sister had been touting all those years ago, and the day's events served nothing to change that in her mind. Even if it were true, the fact remained that Terry was no longer a functioning human being. That would leave Becky as the primary caregiver to, in her mind, a damaged child. Becky had already missed out on the life she wanted 10 years ago and wasn't about to be burdened by a responsibility they had no evidence of.

After El, Joyce, and Hopper returned to Hawkins, Karen was informed of the day's events. State documents didn't yet even recognize El as a person, and so there were no actual records that ever linked El to the Ives. With Becky unwilling to pursue the matter, in many respects it was a relief to Joyce, Jim, and Karen; it simplified things. El's possible biological relations had been the big hurdle in their discussions. They did what they had to so as not to deprive El from a possible true family, and now they could move forward. They all cared about El's best interests and that meant the girl being with someone she could trust. El needed to rely on the people who cared about her when nobody else would, and she wouldn't get it with the Ives.

When Mike arrived home from school earlier that afternoon, he of course had been peppering Karen about El's whereabouts. She managed to hold him off for a time, but after being updated of where things stood, told her son the truth. Karen found Mike was surprisingly quiet when getting the rundown.

When Karen first started explaining where El had gone, Mike was visibly conflicted at the notion of El having an actual family to go home to. He didn't want to prevent El from going to see her real mom, but selfishly he would want her to remain with him. Then, as the details about Terry Ives emerged, he felt oddly guilty for his previous emotions given what the poor woman went through. And since El hadn't been told what was going on, she was surely a bit confused, he figured. Either way, Mike felt he really had something he needed to talk to El about it. While awkward when it came to anything remotely romantic, he had a way of gingerly connecting with El on the touchiest of subjects about her life.

After the long day, El had settled back into her favourite place: the basement. She was glancing at some of the stories with pictures that she cherished so much.

"Hey El?"

El perked up immediately at that simple call from the voice she responded to above all others.

"Hi, Mike," she responded, following it with her now signature small smile

"Um, how was your day?"

"Okay."

Okay, was of course, the word she found herself using more these days. The world for her had once seemed pretty black and white; there were bad things and, occasionally, good things. El was beginning to discover more in life was somewhere in the middle, and this day was certainly one of mixed emotions.

"Well, I'm glad you're back now anyway. Um, you know how I have my mom and my dad," Mike started.

El nodded.

"Well, everybody has parents. Including you. I mean, not everyone has a good one."

"Papa," El darkened at the thought.

Mike took a beat. He hated ever having to remind El of the dark past of hers, but it was something he couldn't really avoid in this situation. He pressed on.

"But somewhere you have a mom too."

El stared at him. She often did this when she wasn't following, but this time she did have something more on her mind.

"I understand, Mike. I know."

She offered Mike a knowing look that told him all he needed to. Despite what his mom had said, El knew more about her day trip than anyone had given her credit. She knew the people before her were probably her real mom and real aunt, and yet there she was back at the Wheeler household, affected by what she had seen but surprisingly resilient.

Mike struggled with where he was going with his thoughts now. There was so much he could say, but ultimately he just wanted El to know that he knows she's missed out on a lot and he's there for her.

"Okay....well, I'm sorry things didn't go as well as they could have. And, I don't know if... I just, just wanted to tell you it's okay if you ever wished you had, you know, your real family, the one you should have had all along. It's okay to feel that way."

"Mike?" His name seemed to be her favourite word above all others. She used it to share excitement, as a warm greeting, and a sign of confusion. In this case, it was to ease the mind of the babbling boy.

"My real family is here," she stated before unabashedly bringing him into a hug.

5. Home Option 4: Foster Care

Summary for the Chapter:

The option nobody wants.

Notes for the Chapter:

Sorry for such another short one, but hope to give some more significant developments in this story soon!

Although the book may have closed on the possibility of El going to the Ives home, there stood one significant default for unidentified children with no families: foster care. It was the inevitable conclusion to El's story had poor Benny reached who he intended that one day in November. Child services would have come around, they would be at loss to find anyone responsible for El, and after some time she would find herself in the home of a family willing to take her in. If that had been El's destiny, maybe it wouldn't have been so bad. Despite what had been thrown her way, El was kind, caring, and selfless with those she grew to trust. There was, of course, the risk of her powers complicating matters. But beyond that, if she found herself in a loving home, any loving home, it would have gone a long way toward a happier life for the girl.

What happened since, of course, forever changed the course. She met Mike and company. She developed friendships and love for people who cared about her in return. She grew attached, as did they. And so what might have been the very best option for her once upon a time would now result in losing the only loving stability she had ever known. Putting El through the system was now the option nobody wanted. Sure, she could end up in a caring family, perhaps even within the town of Hawkins. But everyone knew after all she'd been through, that was not going to fly anymore. For them, and certainly not for El.

As it turned out, they managed to avoid having to confront this difficult situation against their wishes. Fortunately, Hawkins was a community where who you knew helped you work through a lot of

the bureaucracy. With that, Jim Hopper, with his position in town, was able to pull some strings. Most importantly, that meant no dragging El through the legal system to figure it out. Any paperwork that needed to be there would get settled once they arrived to a decision. It was great news and how they found themselves with the luxury to even weigh these options internally. Of course, that still left them with determining what that ultimate decision should be, one they were still having trouble with.

6. Home Option 5: The Wheelers

Summary for the Chapter:

El goes to the Wheelers in the meantime, but then what?

Karen and Ted Wheeler were the last parties in the know to ever hear about El's existence. Of course, their understanding was helped in no small part thanks to El's biggest advocate also being situated in the household. When the girl disappeared, the Wheeler parents had a lot of catching up to do. Well, Karen did. Ted was content to move on. With Nancy and Mike grieving their respective losses, life was not a particular happy one in the household. Karen had heard from Joyce and Jim about the events that took place and Eleven's tragic backstory, but they only had so much to offer about the friendships that were created among the kids, in the center of that being Mike.

At first, Mike didn't want to talk about El, but as the months went by and the despair turned to sorrow, he finally opened up. About most of it, anyway. Karen had been somewhat embarrassed at first that a girl had been hidden under their very roof for a week without noticing. Although a little hurt that her son didn't trust her with such a secret, she soon began to understand the predicament. Chances are, not knowing what was to come, they wouldn't have stood for it, and then who knows what would have happened? Either way, mother and son came to terms with what had happened, with Nancy to also helping share in the memory of the poor girl where she could. Even Ted did his best to cheer up Mike on occasion.

But then El came back, and that complicated matters. Karen was there for her son with the events behind them, but now there was a flesh and blood girl who needed a home. And to El, the Wheeler house was the only place she'd ever really called home.

El staying with them was of course what Mike had originally planned and hoped for all along, but now he had parents to convince. Fortunately for him, it was decided as a group that El would stay there on a temporary basis while they sorted out what to do next. Ted remained ever the skeptic of the idea, agreeing only on the fact

that it was temporary and that he be left alone. Karen, while hesitant, was always wanting to connect better to her kids, and once she saw how the spark in her son returned, she couldn't say no. It was the only tenable position the group could find on such short notice. She needed familiarity and stability, which the Wheeler home undoubtedly could offer. Financially they were best off out of any of the families, easily being able to support another child. And the question of needing a devoted caregiver for El was swiftly nullified once they saw Mike doting on her at every moment.

With a few weeks having passed, a permanent place for El became another matter. It was all well and good to take the girl in for a short time, but who would officially adopt her once all was said and done? El's suspected real family was a no go. Nobody wanted her to be go into the system. Joyce and Jim had valid motivations to do so, but adverse factors in their lives. Karen and Ted had their own reservations that would come up too...

Notes for the Chapter:

Thanks for reading! More Mike/Eleven moments coming soon.

7. A Proposal

Summary for the Chapter:

Karen breaks the news to Mike, leading to an unexpected turn.

Notes for the Chapter:

Comments and suggestions welcome as always!

Something had to give. This tight-knit group of people now cared for El and, after all she'd been through, it was time to give her the stability she needed. But where was that going to be?

The Wheelers had now had El under their roof for a few weeks, and things seemed to be going really well. Ted, as usual, kept to himself and focused on matters outside of their little household (as long as there was no yelling or swearing). Karen was adjusting ably having an extra person to keep track of -- at least she thought so -- while El found Karen kind and caring, reminding her of Mike. Nancy and Holly gave El the chance to bond with girls of two vastly different ages; she loved both having someone to look up to and, an even bigger novelty, having someone look up to her. Last but not least was Mike, and with Eleven they formed an almost inseparable pair. Of course, Joyce and Hopper pitched in wherever they could. Joyce, though preoccupied, still made time to stop by every few days and embraced the fun aunt role she never had the chance to be. Hopper was far more distant in his interactions, but when it came to dealing with anything official, he was always there to take care of it.

So if things were going well, could this be the solution? Well not quite so fast, at least according to Karen and Ted.

Another thing to know about Ted was his rule-oriented approach to life. Someone lays down the law and that's what you follow, just like the government. In that household, he believed that to be him. He wasn't a monster; he had heard what the girl had gone through, so he, ever so charitably, opened up his home to a wayward girl. But it was not his child and not his problem, so he agreed on condition that

it was only going to be temporary. Now there was talk that they would shelter her permanently? He hadn't agreed to that.

Karen was far more active in the decision-making process and had grown to care about the girl as much as anyone. In spite of anything, El was such a polite, soft-spoken presence in the home that having another child really wasn't a bother to her at all. But of course there was a bit of an elephant in the room regarding El, one that had emerged through a bit of intuition and guiding along in some... conversations with Nancy (i.e. mother-daughter gossip). She saw the way her son looked at El, and their closeness made her feel like a mother-in-law already...to a 13 year old. Getting Mike to admit to anything of the sort about his feelings did not seem forthcoming, but adopting El and making her the fourth Wheeler sibling would put a complicated spin on that business, and that made Karen uncomfortable.

All of these questions hung in the air when Karen dragged Ted to meet with Joyce and Jim and arrive at a final decision, one that would hopefully mean the end of this elongated discussion.

The next morning, Mike woke up surprisingly early and found his mother already busying herself in the kitchen. Karen turned to his presence with a smile.

"Good morning Michael."

Mike could tell right away from how she shifted her attention to him that this wasn't a normal morning greeting. His mom was obviously leading into something important.

"As I'm sure you're aware, we've been talking about El and where she is going to live...long-term."

That was all it took for Mike to bring up his defenses. "But I promised her, mom. That this could be her home. Nobody else is able to--"

"I know, I know, that's what I wanted to talk to you about."

The hope returned to Mike. He had expected to have to put more of a fight.

Karen continued. "I was going to ask how you felt about us adopting El? She could be your new sister!"

Mike suddenly shuddered at the thought. He knew there had to be catch. He wanted El to live with them like a family, but he stopped short of considering her a sibling. Suddenly the boy who was ready to protest was quiet, pondering how to deal with the proposal before him. So many emotions filtered through the poor boy's head, and he was clearly conflicted by the time the answer came out of his mouth.

"I don't know, Mom."

"Oh? I thought that's what you wanted?" Karen asked, oddly knowing.

Unbeknownst to Karen and Mike, it was a case of bad timing, for in that moment a certain young girl, who had just woken up, was wandering down the hallway to hear Mike's next words.

"Do you actually have to adopt El? I just don't know if that's the best thing to do."

El, who had yet to make her presence known, walked away slowly and solemnly...

8. Not So Fast

Summary for the Chapter:

Karen and Mike's conversation continues right where it left off.

A pensive Mike found himself saying something he didn't think he would ever say.

"Do you actually have to adopt El? I just don't know if that's the best thing to do."

"What do you mean, Michael?" Karen pressed on as if she already knew what was going on in her son's head.

Now flustered, he was perhaps a bit more direct than he would normally have wanted to be with his mother of all people.

"It's just..." Mike sighed in frustration. "I don't want her to be my sister."

"And why is that?" Karen raised her eyebrows expectantly.

"Because I...I like her."

Finally, Karen heard what she was looking for all along and stopped feigning ignorance.

"I know you do. It's obvious from the way you look at her, and Nancy has filled in the rest of the gaps. You certainly don't treat your sisters like you do El, that's for sure."

Mike, of course, was genuinely surprised. Here he thought he was keeping those feelings all to himself; at the very least he usually counted on his mother not to notice those things.

"I just wanted to hear my boy say it out loud that he likes a girl." Karen offered a grin to Mike that was a mixture of cheeky and proud. Of course, Mike in that moment in time really just wanted to hide and never come out again. How embarrassing!

But of course there was still a more important matter to discuss. He was about to ask why she put him through that ruse, but before he had a chance Karen, who seemed to be on her game today, answered that one too.

"You were right though, we talked about it. With everything Joyce and Jim are going through, there really isn't a better place for her than here. And truthfully, I want her to stay too. She's such a sweet girl, Michael."

Hope and excitement returned to Mike. Was this actually happening? Could El actually stay like he had promised?

"So she's staying here? Really? And she won't be my sister?"

"If the two of you are okay with it, I think we have it all figured out."

Karen shifted her tone to command a semblance of authority. "But just remember, we'll be keeping an eye on you two. You're going to have to be good to each other. We can't have anybody walking around broken-hearted every day."

"Thanks, Mom." Mike had gone through so many emotions in those few minutes, and now he found himself embracing his mother in a big hug.

"One more thing. We need ask El what she wants. What do you say?"

"I'm on it."

The arrangement they had actually settled on was a bit of an amalgam. Officially, Jim Hopper was the state advocate for El, taking on the lead role in determining her future and eventually become her legal guardian on paper. His position and connections would help them avoid the lengthy, complicated process that might otherwise arise to get El recognized. For a variety of reasons, he was not in the position to provide support emotionally, at least not in a full-time capacity. Promising to work together as a unit for any major decisions and work together if problems were to come up in the future, a lot of Karen's fears about keeping El were quelled. And so,

after that late-night conversation it was decided that El's primary home environment and caregiving would in fact remain with the Wheelers. Ted, ever the reluctant one, had no choice but to come around to it or else face the wrath of his wife and son. It was a bit of a convoluted setup, but one they made work. It seems everyone's interests were served.

Mike bringing the (hopefully) good news to El, of course, was the last thing they needed to seal it.

Notes for the Chapter:

Thanks for your patience! I'm thinking of making this 10 chapters now because there's a couple more things I want to cover before all is said and done. Thanks for your comments; I always make sure to read them!

9. Moment of Truth

Summary for the Chapter:

Mike goes to inform Eleven she can stay with him, but it's a little more complicated than expected.

"El! Are you awake yet?" Mike wanted to keep his joy in check but obviously was incapable of that based on the jubilation glowing from his face as he trounced down the stairs to the basement. El's quarters had remained down there for the time being. After all, with the possible exception of Mike's room, the basement remained her place of choice in the Wheeler house.

He found the girl sitting on her bed, turned away from him and fidgeting at something. "Mike," she exclaimed as she hesitantly began to turn to him.

"Morning, El. Um, you know how you've been living here these past few weeks."

With a constant need to comfort El, Mike's heart sunk when he saw her face. She was always happy to be in his presence, but in this moment she couldn't hide the tears in her eyes. Mike didn't know that the poor girl was feeling uncertain about her future for the first time since coming back, all because of something she had overheard him say.

Mike's mood immediately shifted, concerned. "What's wrong, El? Did you have a nightmare?"

El shook her head and tried her best to compose herself. "It's okay, Mike." While she still subscribed to friends telling the truth, in this moment she simply lacked how to articulate what she was feeling.

Mike still couldn't read why El was upset, and she wasn't forthcoming about why. He hoped what he thought was good news might be just what she needed to cheer her up, but he was also suddenly nervous about broaching the subject. He had no reason to worry, right?

"Um, okay, well...everyone's been talking about it and figuring out what's best for where you live." El's eyes widened. "So, um, if you had a choice...um...would..."

Usually it was El who was short on what she was searching to say, but now Mike seemed to be struggling. El grasped where the conversation was heading, though. She could tell it was difficult for him in this moment to say what she thought he was trying to say, something she understood all too well.

"No," Eleven said resolutely.

The boy's face fell.

Notes for the Chapter:

A short one here. Only one more left to go, which will probably be a little longer. Promise it all comes together next time around. Thanks for reading!

10. What Are You?

Summary for the Chapter:

Mike and Eleven try to work through a big misunderstanding about El's future. They end up learning a lot more about the nature of their relationship.

Mike couldn't believe it. He was incredulous. He hadn't even finished saying what he had planned to, and she just shot him down. Against all odds, the arrangement he always wanted, and he thought she always wanted, was working out in their favour, and El doesn't even want to hear him out? Mike was usually composed and soft-spoken with El, but here there was almost a hint of anger. "No? Why?"

From El's perspective, she *was* fighting for she wanted. But now El could tell Mike was upset, and that just made her upset too. "I, I don't want to go," she managed to speak out, soft and full of emotion. El presented Mike with what she had been hiding behind her.

El had drawn him a picture, and though it was quite basic, the message was clear. It was Mike and El. They were smiling and holding hands by what looked to be her basement fort. That wasn't all either. El had attempted a letter to Mike. She was still working on her writing and communication skills, but that too didn't matter one bit.

'Mike. I luv you. You r my favrit. I want to stay hear With you,' the words read.

Mike smiled and blushed at the sentiment. Just like that, all the tension building up in Mike's mind quickly went away. He wasn't sure why El had misunderstood, but then again he had assumed the worst himself when his mother broached the subject that very morning. El must have been worried about the adults deciding something different just as much as he had. Relieved beyond belief, Mike held in a laugh. He had been worried for nothing.

El of course didn't see matters quite like that in the moment. She was

almost offended at his making light of what she thought was a serious, heartfelt plea. Then she heard the boy clarify.

"Oh, El. That's what I was trying to tell you. If you want to stay, you can. My mom, my dad, Chief Hopper, they just needed you to agree."

Mike offered a big smile to the girl, and with that much of the tension left her as well. Mike looked happy telling her the news; he must want her to stay after all! But then what was he saying earlier?, El thought.

Mike was so pleased to see the relief on El's face, but he could see that something else was on El's mind that didn't quite alleviate all that concern.

"What is it, El?"

"You don't want to... a...adopt me?"

El was getting better with words, but she was still working on understanding more difficult concepts. She knew the magnitude of adoption, but wasn't quite sure how to put it.

Mike found the phrasing of her question adorable and hilarious, but then the thought dawned on him that she may have overheard the talk with his mother that morning.

"El, did you hear me talking to my mom?"

El nodded.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean what I said, not like that. It's just, my mom said we would be brother and sister."

"Bad?" El questioned.

"Not bad, it's just.... different, remember? Like when I was telling you about the snowball?"

El recalled back to that night in the cafeteria. So much had happened since, and most of her thoughts of those moments were about Mike "kissing" her. El nodded and a smile crept on her lips at the

memory.

"But we don't have to worry about that. The chief is going to take care of the paperwork, and we'll keep things the way they are. Isn't it great?"

"YES!" With all her fears gone, the girl showed a rare display of genuine excitement and embraced Mike in a hug.

"I think my mom was just trying to get it out of me that I....." Mike paused. "That I like you."

"Why?" she asked as she released him from her arms.

"Family can be dumb like that sometimes."

El still wondered what this meant for Mike and her. "Mike, what are you?"

He took a beat, a little confused. El had a way of just speaking her mind that still took a bit of getting used to when he couldn't follow her line of thought.

"Not friend.... not brother.... what are you?" she added.

"Oh, um...." Another agonizing pause. "....boyfriend I guess?" he answered, almost questioning the term as he said it. "I mean, if you want me to be."

'Boyfriend', of course, became her new favourite word. The very next time they came over, El proudly proclaimed to the boys who Mike was to her now. It was often the first thing she would say to people, even those she was meeting for the first time. Mike was simultaneously proud and embarrassed each time.

It didn't take long for everything to get settled from there. El, a girl who had lived a life devoid of love and happiness for so many years now had many people going to bat for her. Now, she finally had a home, a home with the first person she loved and who loved her back. And if Mike had any say in what was in store for them down

the road, she always would.

Notes for the Chapter:

I hope you enjoyed following along. Thanks so much for reading! The ones in this Mike/Eleven Slice of Life series have all been situated in the same universe and have been fluffy for the most part. I have a few ideas for other stories below and would love to hear your thoughts. They would still all be Mike/Eleven stories more or less.

1. Another fluffy one-off installment to this series. Likely progressing from the bonding in this story and the others.
2. A fluffy story situated within the first season that would alter later events in the season.
3. A darker, standalone story.